

Denver and Farm Labor Families

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The City of Denver is a natural distributing center for farm labor families. Many good citizens with permanent homes in the city go out to work on farms year after year. Other high-grade-labor families more migratory in their habits of life, after crops are harvested, come into the city to live for the winter in temporary, often poor quarters and to leave early in the spring, to work again on farms. Still others with lower standards of life and work habits are attracted to the larger center of population during intervals between seasons of farm work.

No one really knows how many farm labor families *with children* go out from or come into Denver during any one season. Those who express interest in the matter generally agree on two points. First, children of migratory labor families suffer great loss of school time as the city school records show. There is a great influx of children each fall when families come in after harvest, and a great exodus each spring when families leave for farm work. Second, farm labor families sometimes become stranded in Denver during the winter and, either because they have not earned enough to support themselves or through ignorance in the use of what they have earned, or through sickness or misfortune, become dependent on the people of the city.

In order to secure information on these two points we made brief inquiry in April 1925 following the close of the study of work children were doing on farms in Colorado. Through the courtesy of the Superintendent of Schools in the City and County of Denver the Attendance Department conducted the inquiry in all schools in the city in which as many as ten children of farm labor families were involved. The principals and teachers furnished records of attendance, age and grade for all such children enrolled in their buildings and certain information bearing on the families. When this was completed we went to the Confidential Exchange conducted by the Denver Federation of Social Agencies in order to find out which families were known to social agencies in the city. With the assistance of those in charge we "cleared" the family names and addresses through the Exchange and noted information as to dates and agencies to which they were known. Later we consulted records of the agencies for facts as to the kind and amount of assistance families had received.

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Except for two, perhaps three, reasons information secured in this manner would cover the *whole* number of farm labor families whose children lost school time in Denver during the year of 1924-1925, and all those who had received assistance during the winter. The school records were taken up to and including April third. Doubtless a number of children dropped out during the remaining seven weeks of school when their families left for the country. Then, too, there were a few families with children of school age who came into the city, did not send their children to school and left before school authorities knew about them. Therefore, the list secured is not complete for all the children and their families for the *entire* school year. Something like *thirty* organizations, engaged in social work in the city, used the Confidential Exchange. However, there were ten or a dozen groups, some small, some large, rendering assistance to families who did not *exchange* information with others doing similar service. For the purpose of this study it seemed practical to secure information *only* from those agencies, both public and private, using the Confidential Exchange. Therefore, the service information does not include all that was rendered to all these families by *all* groups in Denver during the winter of 1924-1925.

In April 1925 there were 771 children of 370 farm labor families reported by sixteen schools as having entered late in the fall of 1924 when families moved into Denver or left early in the spring of 1925 when families moved out of the city to work on farms. There were 186 of the 370 families reported by social service agencies using the Exchange as having received assistance in some form or other during the winter.

The 771 children had attended an average of 62 out of 145 school days or 42.5 per cent of the time school had been in session. Grouped according to school age 165 children of pre-school age, 7 years or under, had attended an average of 57.3 out of 145 school days or 39.5 per cent of the school time; 597 of compulsory-school age, 8 to 15 years, averaged 62.9 out of 145 school days or 43.4 per cent of the school time; 9 of post-school age, 16 years or over, averaged 59.5 out of 145 school days or 41.0 per cent of the school time. In all probability children who came in late in the fall did not attend any place prior to entering Denver and those who left early in the spring had no more schooling until they entered in the fall of 1925. With but seven weeks until the close of the school year at best the children could not possibly attend an average of a half of the nine-month-year.

Measured by Terman's two-year standard 11 or 1.4 per cent were accelerated; 288 or 37.4 per cent, at age; 472 or 61.2 per cent, retarded in grade standing.* Information on the promotion for all children was not reported, however, 263 were reported as "repeaters" for a total of 438 times.

Seventy per cent of the children belonged to Spanish speaking families, Spanish Americans and natives of Mexico, all loosely called "Mexican." Of the 538 Mexican children 120 were pre-school age; 409 compulsory-school; and 9, post-school age. They all attended an average of 57.6 out of 145 school days or 39.7 per cent of the school time. According to Terman's standard 4 or .70 per cent were accelerated; 171 or 31.8 per cent, at age, 363 or 67.5 per cent, retarded. Of the 363 there were 82 retarded one year; 95, two years; 145, three years or more; 41, "special" or ungraded.

*Grade standing for all the children in Denver Schools is given in the "Twenty-first Annual Report" (1923-1924) by Superintendent Jesse H. Newlon.

Elementary; 12.4% Under Age, Acceler'd; 53.4% Normal Age; At Age; 34.2% Over Age, Retarded
Jr. High ; 22.7% Under Age, Acceler'd; 43.5% Normal Age; At Age; 33.8% Over Age, Retarded
Sr. High ; 27.6% Under Age, Acceler'd; 40.5% Normal Age; At Age; 31.9% Over Age, Retarded

Promotion information was not given for all but of the 538 Mexican children, 197 or 36.6 per cent were reported repeating their grades for a total of 341 times. There were 41 of pre-school age; 152, compulsory-school; and 4, post-school age. The "repeaters" were distributed among the grades as follows:

Kindergarten	19; 12 for the first time; 7, the second
First-grade	66; 24 for the first time; 22, the second; 20, the third
Second-grade	40; 17 for the first time; 13, the second; 10, the third
Third-grade	30; 16 for the first time; 11, the second; 3, the third
Fourth-grade	16; 7 for the first time; 7, the second; 2, the third
Fifth-grade	20; 11 for the first time; 9, the second
Sixth-grade	6; 3 for the first time; 1, the second; 2, the third

In all other racial groups, non-Spanish, there were 233 children; 45 of pre-school age; 188, compulsory-school; and not any of post-school age. They all attended an average of 71.2 out of 145 school days or 49.1 per cent of the school time. According to Terman's standard 7 or 3 per cent were accelerated; 117 or 50.2 per cent, at age; 109 or 46.8 per cent, retarded in grade standing. Of the 109 there were 57 retarded one year; 33, two years; 16, three years or more; 3, "special" or ungraded.

Among those for whom promotion information was given 66 out of 233 or 28.3 per cent of the non-Spanish were reported repeating their grades for a total of 97 times. Ten "repeaters" were of pre-school age; 56, compulsory school; and not any of post-school age. They were distributed among the grades as follows:

Kindergarten	1; for the first time
First-grade	7; 3 for the first time; 4, the second
Second-grade	15; 10 for the first time; 4, the second; 1, the third
Third-grade	13; 4 for the first time; 5, the second; 4, the third
Fourth-grade	5; 3 for the first time; 2, the second
Fifth-grade	12; 10 for the first time; 1, the second; 1, the third
Sixth-grade	8; 5 for the first time; 3, the second
Seventh-grade	5; 5 for the first time

These school children, as already stated, belonged to 370 farm labor families. Eleven social service agencies using the Confidential Exchange registered some contact with some of the families during the winter of 1924-25. From their records we found that 186 of the families had received assistance and 184 had not. In previous years 98 of the same families had been known to some of the agencies, a few as early as 1914.

A large variety of social service had been rendered, all of which we have grouped under four heads: social, relief, social-medical, and medical. The care which the Denver School, through its Departments of Attendance and Health, provided for school children fell under all four heads and included all families hence it is counted separately.

The school rendered social service to children of 96 farm labor families; special relief, as shoes, stockings and glasses to children of 46 families; social-medical and medical service to the entire 370 families, as all children entering school were given physical examinations with recommendations and instructions to their parents as to the needs of each child.

All the other agencies rendered service to individual families as follows: social, to 77 families; relief, to 71; social-medical, to 45; and medical, to 58 families.

In "nationality" the native-born Spanish American and the Mexican lead in about equal numbers in the head of the family. There were 133 Spanish American; 137 Mexican; 47 Russian German; 30 American; 7 Italian; 3 Austrian; 2 each, Irish, Pole, German and Russian; 1 each, Hungarian, Hollandeese, English, Danish and Negro.

A dozen or so families did more than one kind of work while they lived in the country though hand work on sugar beets leads with the largest number. Of the 370 families 304 worked beets; 45 did general farm labor; 14 worked in truck gardens; 3, in fruit, 7, in various kinds of unskilled labor; and for 14 the information was lacking. The majority, or 302 families, worked under contract; 22, for wage; 11, by piece, and for 35 this information was not known. Satisfactory data on the total earnings for farm work were secured for 15 families who averaged \$626.83 during the season. Of the 370 families, 238 worked on farms in the state of Colorado; 10, in Nebraska; 10, in New Mexico; 6, in Wyoming; 3, in Montana; 2 each, in Oklahoma and Texas; 1 each, in California, Oregon, Kansas, Missouri, South Dakota; and for 94 the place of work was not known.

Information regarding work during the winter when families lived in Denver was secured for 133 families. Of that number 64 fathers did have work, mostly common labor, and 69 did not. Among other members of the households 34 had work of some kind during the winter. Information on housing in Denver was complete for 78 families who occupied an average of 2.7 rooms per family.

Living in one-room quarters were: one family of 3 persons; three, of 6 persons each; six, of 7 each; three, of 8 each; two, of 9 persons each; and one, of 12 persons.

Living in two-room quarters were: one family of 3 persons; one, of 4 persons; five, of 5 persons each; one, of 7 persons; two, of 8 each; two, of 10 each; one, of 11 persons; three, of 12 each; one, of 13 persons; and one, of 16 persons.

Two difficulties became apparent in the course of the inquiry. First; Denver is confronted with an increasingly difficult situation the solution of which has not been reached by the school authorities who hold themselves responsible for the educational training of children even though remaining under their jurisdiction but a few months each year. Children are often handicapped because of language, of family characteristics and customs. Children whose parents are permanent residents of the city suffer great loss of school time, become seriously retarded and swell the ranks of the discouraged "repeaters." Children who belong to non-resident families not only lose a large amount of school but suffer the additional hardship of not "belonging" any place. Second: In the main, families who are permanent residents of the city have friends among the church or neighborhood folk to whom they turn when dire need overtakes them. Not so with non-resident families. Usually they are strangers speaking and understanding only a strange language, little known, less understood. When in distress or in need of friendly advice it is difficult for them to know where to turn for the kind of help they need. Few groups organized for social service of any kind have workers who speak or understand their language. Satisfactory interpreters are scarce. Result: Families become bewildered and go from one group to another in search of an understanding friend. Agencies become bewildered. In spite of a very definite effort to work together for the common interest of all, there is need for a fuller, well-informed, continuing and final responsibility to these families, whatever their needs, and to all the citizens of Denver.

